

Mediating Role of Shame and Guilt in Conflict Resolution Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The factors of guilt-proneness and shame-proneness are found to influence the kind of coping strategies adopted by the individuals. The emotion of shame is more concerned with the global aspect of self-identity whereas the emotion of guilt revolves around a particular action committed. Therefore, shame is associated with a negative apprehension from others leading to greater anxiety whereas guilt is associated with a tendency to take responsibility for the actions. Consequently, it has been found that those individuals who are more prone to experiencing guilt adopt co-operative coping styles whereas those individuals experiencing shame adopt non-cooperative coping styles. The present study has tried to replicate these findings. 2 scales measuring, shame-proneness and guilt-proneness and their coping styles, respectively, were administered to a sample of 50 people and co-relations between the variables are computed. The tests used were 'Conflict Resolution Questionnaire' devised by Johnson in 1990 and 'Guilt And Shame Proneness' devised by Cohen et al in 2011. Findings and practical implications of the same are discussed. The results did not support the hypothesis. In fact there were strong correlations found for guilt and non cooperative strategies. This could be attributed to internal as well external factors associated with guilt which motivates a person to engage in non cooperative strategies.

Keywords: *Mediating Role, Shame, Guilt, Conflict Resolution Strategies*

Emotion is a powerful medium of experiencing and expressing things. An emotion is a complex psychological state that involves three distinct components: a subjective experience, a physiological response, and a behavioral or expressive response. Emotions play important role in human life as they form a very strong component of any action that humans perform. Role of emotions in decision making to some extent is dependant on the type, strength and valence of emotions.

Interpersonal conflict exists when two or more people disagree which emerges due to existence of disparate views, opposing perspectives, incompatible goals, and a desire to try to address and resolve the differences. Because conflict is unavoidable, it is recommended that

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the constructive resolutions strategies be used to resolve it for a healthy relationship. (Wilmot & Hocker, 2006).

Blake and Mouton (1964) were among the first researchers to suggest a conceptual scheme for categorizing different styles of coping with conflict, a model later elaborated by Thomas (1976) and Rahim (1983). The styles in the model derive from a combination of two measures, concern for self (the degree to which a person tries to achieve his or her personal goals) and concern for other (the degree to which a person tries to satisfy the other, meet the other's needs, and preserve a positive relationship with him or her) Five styles of coping with conflict are as follows. The competing style is characterized by high concern for self and low concern for others and generates a "win-lose" power dynamic. The obliging style reflects high concern for others and low concern for self, prioritizing others' needs to preserve positive relations with them. The integrating style is characterized by high concern for both self and other and is motivated to find innovative solutions that will meet the needs of both. The compromising style expresses moderate concern for self and others and tends to resolve the conflict by meeting the other side halfway. The avoiding style is characterized by low concern for self and others; resulting into withdrawing and avoiding the conflicting situations totally.

Research has received little attention to interdependence of emotions and conflict resolution but existing research has found out that positive emotions are positively correlated with cooperative coping styles whereas negative emotions are correlated with avoidance of conflict. (Desivilya & Yagil, 2005).

Study by Behrendt and Ben-Ari in 2012 was the first study to study correlation between shame and guilt and types of conflict resolution strategies. They used quantitative data obtained from shame proneness and guilt proneness questionnaires to find correlation. In second experiment, they used data obtained from self report narrative reports to observe characteristics of shame and guilt and establish causal relationship between emotions and conflict resolution styles.

METHODOLOGY

Sample description-

The study was a survey study. The sample contained 50 participants from Mumbai and Pune. There were 30 females and 20 males. The ages of the participants ranged from 16 years to 78 years. All the participants were from a stable social and financial atmosphere and were not known to suffer from any mental condition. Most of the participants were young adults and students.

Procedure-

In order to study the relationship between role of emotions like shame and guilt and conflict resolution strategy, a battery of questionnaires was administered. There were 3 parts of the battery of questionnaire. First part had all the terms and conditions about the study and the demographics. Second part was a questionnaire about shame and guilt. Third part was a questionnaire about conflict resolution strategies. The tests used were 'Conflict Resolution Questionnaire' devised by Johnson in 1990 and 'Guilt And Shame Proneness' devised by Cohen et al in 2011. This testing was conducted on internet but it cannot be counted as computer adaptive testing. The questionnaire was created with the help of Google forms.

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Measures- Statistical measure used was Pearson's correlation which was obtained using 4 different combinations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Behrendt and Ben-Ari (2012) correlated the personality characteristics of guilt-proneness and shame-proneness with different types of coping strategies in 2 experiments. The first study used quantitative measures for analyzing this relationship whereas the second study evaluated the participants' narratives of conflict situations to bring out the characteristic features of guilt and shame. They found that the emotion of guilt is often correlated with co-operative coping strategies whereas the emotion of shame is related to non-cooperative coping strategies.

The present study aimed at replicating these results by administering questionnaires assessing the degree of shame proneness and guilt proneness and correlating those scores with different interpersonal conflict-coping styles. It was hypothesized that those who are more prone to feeling guilt will adopt co-operative coping strategies whereas those who are more prone to feeling shame will adopt non-cooperative coping strategies.

However, upon compiling the scores of all 50 participants, 48 participants were found to be more guilt prone whereas only 2 were more prone towards feeling shame. Therefore the data of those 2 participants was discarded and only the data for guilt proneness was considered for analysis. Co-operative coping style included accommodating, compromising and collaborating styles whereas non-co-operative coping styles included avoiding and competing. The total scores for guilt proneness were compared with co-operative coping strategies and a very low positive co-relation [$r_{48}=0.02$, not significant] was found between the two. To further clarify the picture, guilt scores were co-related with every cooperative coping strategy and a low positive correlation with accommodating strategy [$r_{48}=0.02$, not significant] whereas low negative co-relations with collaborating [$r_{48}= -0.01$, not significant] and compromising [$r_{48} = -0.02$, not significant]. Thus, the results did not support the hypothesis. Hence, guilt scores were further co-related with non-cooperative coping styles and a moderate positive co-relation was found [$r_{48}=0.392$, $p < 0.005$]. Within the non-cooperative strategies, a moderately positive co-relation was found with avoiding strategy [$r_{48}= 0.381$, $p < 0.01$] and a low positive correlation [$r_{48}=0.181$, not significant] with competing strategy.

Thus, completely contradicting the hypothesis, the correlation between guilt proneness and non-cooperative coping strategies was found to be highly significant. One of the ways in which these results could be explained is through the emotion of fear. According to Izard (1991), guilt situations almost always warrant the presence of fear. Guilt results from a violation of internal values and rules of conduct. Thus, fear response could perhaps prompt the person to flee from or avoid the conflict situation rather than fight or resolve the conflict. Izard (1991) also proposes that the aspect of pleasantness that is significantly reduced in the experience of guilt rather than shame; further encouraging the person to avoid conflict-creating situations. Sometimes, moral shame, that is, experiencing shame due to violating moral codes co-occurs with guilt if one imagines being rebuked by others. It is possible that this dimension was expressed in this study since there was very little to not at all significant difference between the scores of guilt proneness and shame proneness of the participants.

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Besides these factors, it is possible that guilt and shame scale was not entirely successful in revealing the true traits of the participants since the scale was developed for a western population and was not adopted for Indian culture.

CONCLUSION

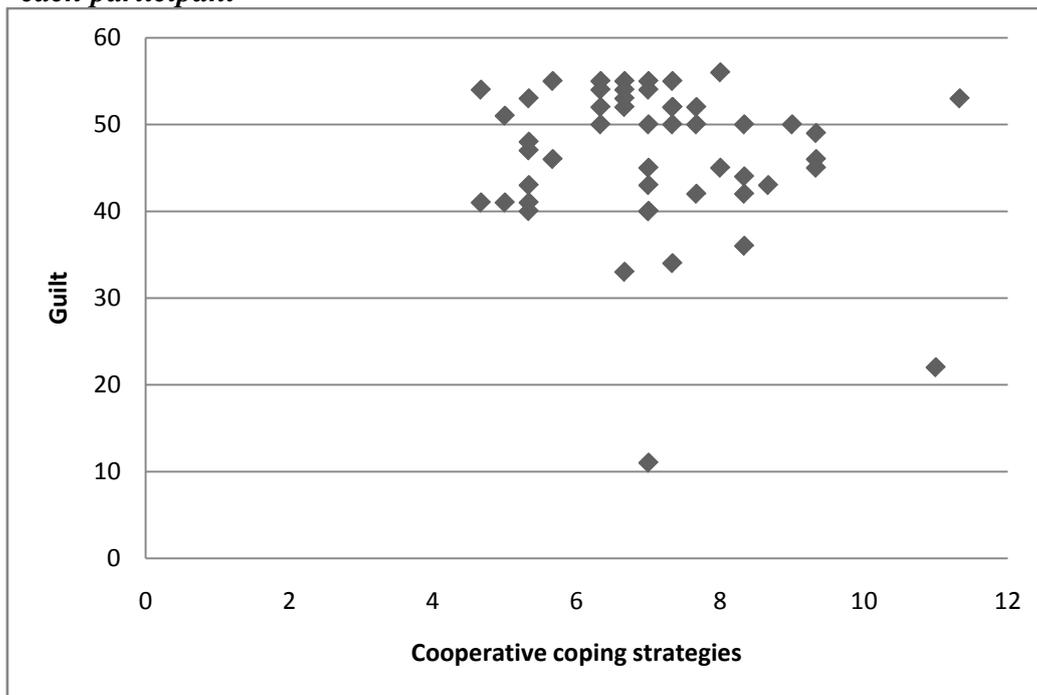
One of the main limitations of this study is that the dimension of shame proneness was not analyzed. Further studies could perhaps take this factor into account aim to explain these contradictory results. Also, perhaps, an experimental manipulation wherein the participants are cued to experience either guilt or shame and then put into interpersonal conflict situations could be a more effective method of analyzing the relation between these two emotions and coping strategies. Lastly, similar studies could be carried out focusing on diverse populations, different cultures and across varied age groups to investigate the various factors that have an effect on the experiencing of different emotions as well as the adoption of different conflict-coping styles.

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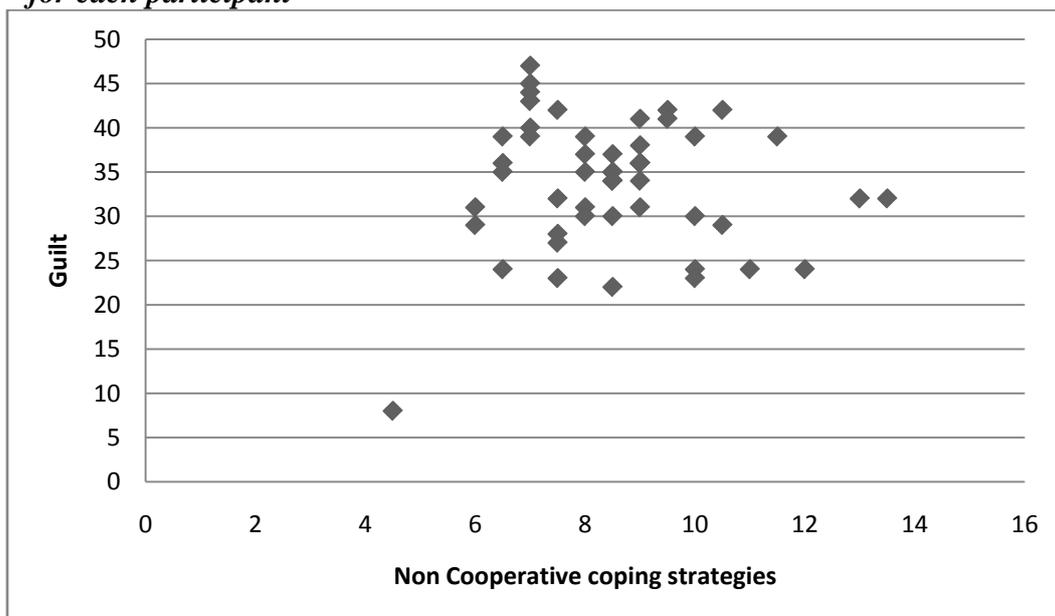
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APPENDIX

1. Correlation between score of cooperative coping strategies and guilt proneness for each participant



2. Correlation between score of non cooperative coping strategies and guilt proneness for each participant



3. Correlation of Guilt with cooperative coping strategies and noncooperative coping strategies

Type of strategies	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Cooperative	0.02	Non significant
Non Cooperative	0.392	p<0.01

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4. Correlation of Guilt with each of cooperative coping strategies

Strategy	Correlation coefficient	Significance
Accommodating	0.02	Not significant
Collaborating	-0.01	Not significant
Compromising	-0.02	Not significant

5. Correlation of Guilt with each of non cooperative coping strategies

Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Avoiding	0.381	p< 0.01
Competing	0.181	Not significant

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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